

## ***Why is Meeting Youth Needs so Important?***

If youth needs are met in positive ways, youth develop characteristics that most of us would relate to character:

- Youth who experience Belonging, tend to be trusting and friendly people.
- Youth with productive opportunities to experience Mastery, tend to become problem-solvers who are motivated and achievement-oriented.
- Youth who experience opportunities to be Independent become confident and self-disciplined leaders, and youth who experience Generosity become caring and empathic people.

If youth needs are met in negative ways, unmet needs can become defining factors in the lives of youth:

- Youth seek to Belong through promiscuous or clinging behaviors.
- Youth attempt to feel Mastery by cheating or developing delinquent skills.
- Youth try to establish Independence by being bullies or through defiant behavior.
- Youth are unable to establish their identity and lose themselves in constantly giving.

If youth needs consistently go unmet, some youth retreat or give up on getting needs met:

- Youth who have not bonded to adults do not bond to institutions. NOT broken families that cause youth violence and other problems but rather broken bonds between youth and adults.
- Youth with no productive opportunities for Mastery often give up easily and avoid risks because it's easier to not try than to try and fail.
- To be respected is to have power. Winning respect through aggressive techniques is immensely important when there is so little to be had.
- Youth with no opportunities to connect meaningfully with others become isolated in their own experience and often become selfish and even antisocial.

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# **Meeting the Needs of Youth**



Youth Development principles emphasize the importance of meeting 4 basic human needs...

**Belonging, Mastery,  
Independence and Generosity**

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Many strategies for working with youth are Deficit-Based meaning they focus on Crisis Management rather than Strength-Based which focuses on teachable moments and opportunities. *The Circle of Courage*, developed by Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg and Steve Van Bockern, emphasizes meeting the most basic psychological needs of youth by creating opportunities that build on individual strengths.

It's easy to think that without adult aid, young people won't be able to meet their own needs or develop skills and values but the truth is, even very young children will create a framework of values and will develop skills to manage daily life. The question becomes what kind of values and what kind of skills? Are the values and skills ultimately self-destructive or ultimately helpful in the life of that youth?

In addition, all youth will use every skill and bit of energy at their disposal to make themselves feel better. Think of walking into a new social situation- the first thing all of us do is look around for someone we know – why? Because each of us, in every situation is hoping to find a way to feel more at ease and more in control. Once we understand this part of human nature, we understand what motivates behavior and can begin to recognize unmet needs.

**All Youth Need to Belong**

Opportunities for relationships and to know they are cared about by others.

- Research shows that the quality of human relationships in schools and youth programs may be more influential than specific techniques or interventions.
- Attachment to family more important predictor of delinquency than family structure.
- Every child needs at least one adult who is crazy about him/her but one may not be enough.

IMPORTANT NOTE: We currently use UNBELONGING as a basis for much of our disciplinary techniques (time outs, suspensions, exclusion, isolation, expelling, etc.)

**All Youth Need to Experience Mastery**

Opportunities for meaningful achievement and to develop skills and confidence.

- Striving for attainment of personal goal not superiority—Competency NOT Competition.
  - A sense that there are things that “I CAN DO, that I matter.”
  - Traditionally, "How I measure up to others" is more important than “How I master a task.”
- However, focus should be on TASK involvement rather than EGO involvement.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The experience of Mastery is directly tied to self-esteem as it's recognizing one's own effort and experiencing the struggle and ultimate success that builds up one's confidence.

**All Youth Need to Experience Independence**

Opportunities to be able to influence people and events and face consequences.

- We expect children to be responsible by being obedient, but only independence builds responsibility. Obedience teaches children how to do what someone else tells them and not question an external locus of control.
- Physical power is another issue for children due to smallness of their actual physical size compared to much around them. Focus on their strength and energy.
  - Our culture places children and youth in powerless situations with no meaningful role.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Children need places where they can regularly contribute to what happens in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways and where their individual voices are heard and respected.

**All Youth Need to Practice Helping Others Through Generosity**

Opportunities to give to others and experience being needed.

- In helping others, we create our own proof of our worthiness.
- Just as we all need to feel attachment to others through belonging, generosity completes the circle by allowing us to attach to others through caring for them.
- Generosity helps us understand the “big picture” and generates a sense of purpose and meaning for youth and is important in the formation of identity.

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Sources: Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M., Van Bockern, S. (1990). *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future*. Bloomington, IN, National Education Service.